

2026 - a year we can approach with cautious optimism



Dear Members,

It feels somewhat out of sync in February to be wishing you a very Happy New Year, particularly when for so many social workers the so-called New Year break has

brought little respite. Continued pressures from the rising cost of living, increasing workloads, chronic staff shortages, and ever-growing levels of complexity in practice remain a daily reality across all areas of social work. For many of you, this has meant difficult decisions, stretched services, and significant emotional and professional strain. I recognise that for many members, 2026 may already feel challenging rather than hopeful.

Despite this, I do wish you the very best for the year ahead, and I do believe that 2026 is a year we can approach with cautious optimism. Social workers continue to play a vital role in supporting individuals, families, and communities facing poverty, inequality, trauma, safeguarding concerns, poor mental health, housing insecurity, and systemic disadvantage. Your professionalism, resilience, and commitment to social justice continue to shine through even in the most difficult circumstances.

At the Social Workers Union, there is much to focus on as we enter our 15th year as a trade union. Interest in the union and what we do remains strong, reflecting the growing need for an independent, profession-led trade union voice that understands the realities of social work practice. Our membership of the General Federation of Trade Unions (GFTU) continues to strengthen our influence within the wider trade union movement and provides valuable opportunities to advocate collectively on issues such as pay, safe workloads, ethical practice, and workforce wellbeing. This newsletter is further evidence of the extensive work we are doing with our limited resources - work we all should be proud that we are doing.

I am particularly pleased that members continue to have opportunities to become actively involved in campaigning. Our ongoing campaigns, alongside new opportunities arising through our partnership with Campaign Collective, allow us to challenge unfair workplace practices, unsafe systems, and policy decisions that undermine both social workers and the people we support. Collective action remains one of our strongest tools for driving meaningful change.

This has been another exceptionally busy period for the union and for our Trade Union Advice and Representation (TU A&R) Team.

The demand for support continues to rise, reflecting increased workplace conflict, disciplinary processes, stress-related issues, restructures, and concerns about professional accountability. The strength of SWU lies in having a dedicated, highly skilled team of BASW / SWU Advice and Representation union officials who understand social work practice and the regulatory, ethical, and organisational pressures that members face. Their commitment to providing high-quality advice, guidance, and representation is one of the key reasons members choose to join BASW and SWU.

Despite increasing referrals and evolving ways of working, the Trade Union A&R Team continues to deliver an outstanding service. Their work often happens quietly and behind the scenes, yet their impact is profound supporting members through some of the most difficult moments of their professional lives and helping to secure fairer outcomes and safer working environments. Quite simply, without their dedication, there would be no union. The SWU Executive continues to strongly support all our work under the careful and considered leadership of SWU Chair Dave Callow.

Finally, I encourage you to help us recruit new members as this has been a challenging period for us to maintain membership in both BASW and SWU. Please share with SWU what is happening in your workplace, and to let us know about campaigns or issues that need collective action. Your voice matters. Getting involved, staying active, and standing together as a profession is how we continue to protect social workers and the values at the heart of social work.

In solidarity.

John McGowan
General Secretary
j.mcgowan@swu-union.org.uk



Call for General Secretary Nominations

The Social Workers Union (SWU) is the trade union dedicated to representing the interests of social workers and the social work profession.

SWU is now seeking nominations for its General Secretary. This is a full-time position, graded at Salary Band 6 (£71,400-£83,527.90).

General Secretary

The General Secretary is the most senior staff position within SWU and the selected candidate will play a key role in taking the union forward in the next step of its evolution. The General Secretary of the Union acts as Chief Executive Officer to the Executive Committee and decision maker on the Executive's behalf and with the SWU Executive in the formulation of, and implementation of SWU's values and strategic goals leading to the organisation achieving its set objectives. This is an opportunity for an individual who is passionate about the success of the Social Workers Union and Social Work in general and who has a track record of leadership and working in partnership with other organisations.

The successful candidate will take up office on the 3rd August 2026 and shall hold office for no more than five years but is eligible to stand again for a further term of office. We aim to have the election process concluded by the 30th April 2026.

The closing date for nominations for General Secretary to be received is 5pm Monday 2nd March 2026.

To stand for election a candidate must meet the conditions set out in SWU Rules, Bye Laws 2.4 and 2.5. A copy of the SWU rules and details of the application process can be found at <https://swu-union.org.uk/about-swu/swu-governance>

Nomination forms, role description and person specification are available from the SWU website at <https://swu-union.org.uk/work-with-swu> or from Joanne Marciano, joanne.marciano@swu-union.org.uk (0121 389 9248).

Please contact Joanne Marciano if you would like to speak to someone informally about standing for this position.



Get Active with the General Federation of Trade Unions

Learning that builds confidence and collective power



The GFTU Educational Trust offers independent trade union education designed to strengthen activists' understanding, skills, and confidence. Its education rooted in real experience, shaped by collective struggle, and focused on building power where it matters most: in our workplaces and communities.

Whether you're a new activist or a seasoned rep, the programme creates space to learn, reflect, debate, and grow alongside others who share a commitment to change.

A programme shaped by the movement

Across the year, activists can take part in a wide range of courses, each responding to the challenges facing working people today.

Political Economy (International sessions) open up global perspectives on capitalism, labour, social reproduction, and the climate crisis connecting local struggles to international realities.

The **Strategy Series** asks big questions about power: how trade unions can develop effective strategies, organise collectively, and strengthen working-class representation in a rapidly changing political and economic landscape.

At the **Political School: Politics and the Economy**, participants explore how economic systems shape political choices and how trade unions can act with confidence and clarity within them.

For those who want to pass knowledge on, **Train the Trainer** courses develop the practical skills needed to deliver effective union education, adapted to different roles across the movement.

Activists' Corner is where theory meets practice building a toolkit for organising, growing membership, and making meaningful change at work.

Through **Creative Activism**, participants experiment with new ways of communicating ideas and struggles, producing creative work with meaning while learning new skills and approaches.

Negotiation Skills courses dig into what really makes negotiations successful where power comes from, how members are involved, and how collective strength is built at the table.

And then there's **Summer School** an intensive, energising space that brings activists and reps together for political education, skills training, and discussion. For many, it's the highlight of the year: a place to build confidence, knowledge, and lasting connections across the movement.

Get involved - and stay connected

The GFTU Educational Trust's programme isn't just about attending a course. It's about becoming part of a wider learning community that supports activists to grow, challenge, and organise together.

 **Sign up to the programme today while spaces last:**

<https://gftuet.org.uk/education>

Because building power starts with learning - and learning is stronger when we do it together.

Social Media

If you have not done so then please follow us on Social Media - we post regular updates about the work and developments of the Social Workers Union.

Monthly Newsletter

Monthly newsletters are emailed to all SWU members. If you are not receiving this then please check what email address we have. The newsletters are also published on the web site.

SWU can be found on the following:

Internet: <https://swu-union.org.uk>

Twitter: https://twitter.com/SWU_UK

Facebook: www.facebook.com/socialworkersunionuk/

YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/@socialworkersunion>

Instagram: www.instagram.com/socialworkersunion

LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/social-workers-union>

Bluesky: <https://bsky.app/profile/swu-uk.bsky.social>

SWU Chair Dave Callow shares

View from the Classroom: Growing into Anti-Oppressive Practice



There's something heartening about being in a room full of future social workers. Every teaching day becomes a reminder of why our profession matters - and why the journey into social work is both challenging and deeply hopeful. A recent session on diversity, anti-oppressive practice, and social divisions offered space not only to learn, but to reflect, to question, and to grow.

We began with the foundations: equality, diversity, culture, and inclusion. These concepts sit at the heart of our professional identity, yet they only come alive when they connect to personal experience. Inviting students to reflect on when they first recognised diversity - or when they felt "othered" - shifted the conversation from abstract definitions to lived experience. Many shared their stories with bravery and openness. These moments remind us that the work of social justice starts within ourselves, long before we enter someone's home or join a multi-agency meeting.

From there, we explored what the profession asks of us. The BASW Professional Capabilities Framework and Social Work England's Professional Standards don't simply set expectations; they articulate the values that bind us together as a community of social workers. Promoting human rights, recognising diversity, and challenging discrimination are not optional extras - they are the very essence of social work. Seeing students connect their own experiences with these frameworks is where personal commitment meets professional purpose.

One of the most engaging parts of the day came during the snap-judgement exercise. Three short descriptions. Three imagined lives. And a powerful reminder of how quickly assumptions take hold. Watching students consider their own instinctive reactions was significant, not because their reactions

were expected to be flawless - but because they were willing to explore them honestly. That willingness is what guides a student towards a reflective practitioner.

The conversation naturally moved toward Anti-Discriminatory Practice and Anti-Oppressive Practice. While Anti-Discriminatory Practice helps us attend to fairness and respect in our one-to-one work, Anti-Oppressive Practice challenges us to zoom out or step back - to notice how policies, institutions, and social structures shape people's lives. It can feel daunting to confront issues like austerity, institutional bias, or structural inequality, we don't need to have all the answers, we just need to be an ally, to stay curious, stay reflective, and keep pushing for equity.

Thompson's PCS model - personal, cultural, and structural - gave us a useful lens for understanding how discrimination operates on multiple levels. Discussing class, poverty, gender, ageism, sexuality, disability, and other social divisions made clear how interconnected these issues are.

As we drew the session to a close, the theme of self-reflection kept returning. Anti-oppressive practice isn't a checklist only; it's a mindset, a guide in the most difficult of times. It's a professional stance that asks us to continually examine our own assumptions, acknowledge what we don't yet know, and recognise the power and privilege we hold. Starting from a position of "not knowing" is not a weakness - it's a form of respect, it is being human.

From my view as lecturer, watching students engage so thoughtfully with these ideas, I left feeling genuinely encouraged. The future of social work is in safe hands.

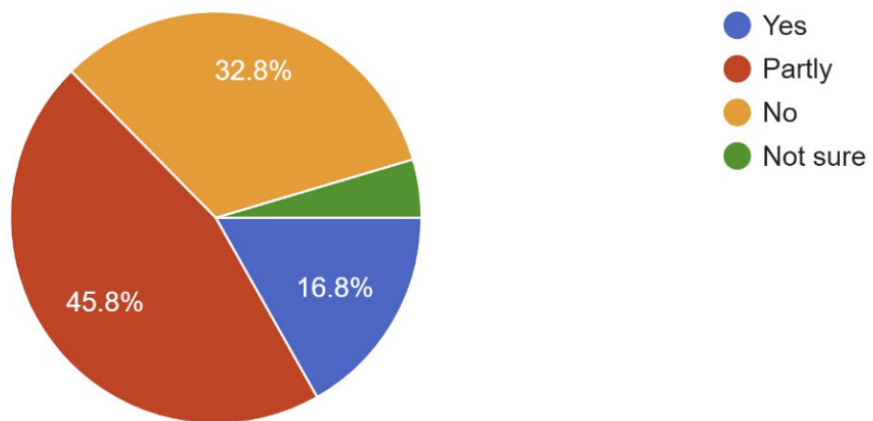
Report on the SWU Health & Safety Survey

When speaking with [Union Contacts](#) the most common workplace issues brought up were related to health and safety with lone working and caseloads being frequently raised. These concerns led to SWU conducting a survey at the end of 2025 to hear what the most common health and safety issues currently are for social workers.

Thank you to the 130 social workers from across the UK who took the SWU Health and Safety Questionnaire!

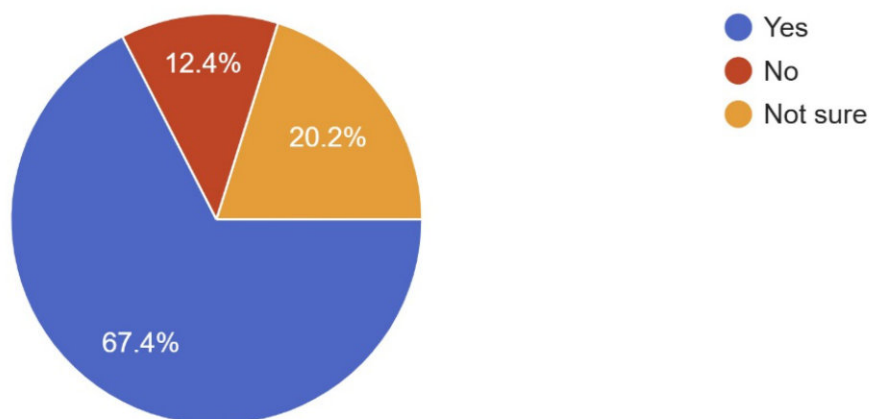
Do you feel you have had enough training to keep yourself safe?

131 responses



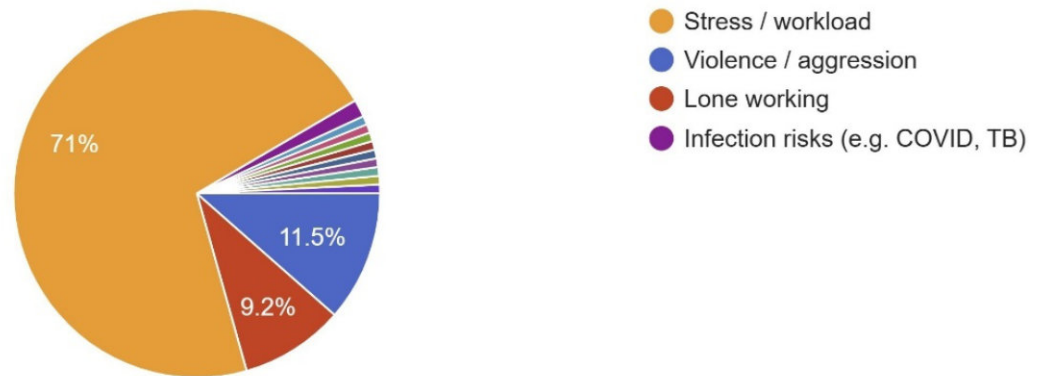
Do you know how to report a health & safety concern in your workplace?

129 responses



What is the biggest health & safety risk you face in your role?

131 responses

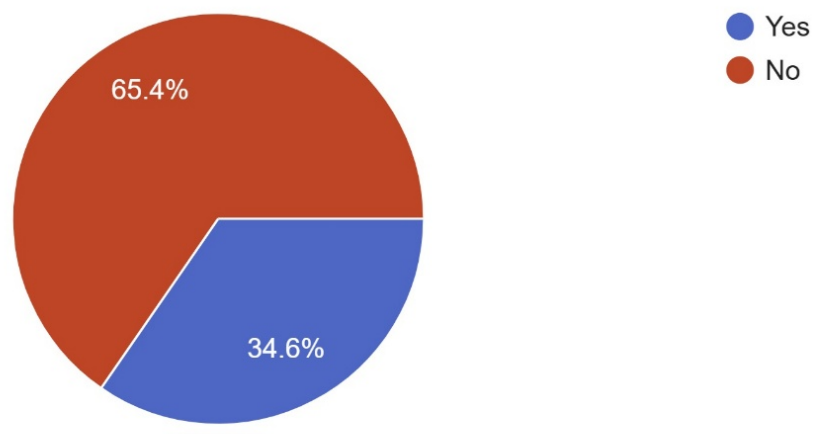


A 71% majority of social workers said that stress / workload is the biggest health and safety risk that they face in their role. Social workers will deal with about 10 stressful work situations a day, with an average of 50 interactions a week. Research published by SWU, BASW, and Bath Spa University showed that on average [social workers are also having to work an extra 11 hours a week unpaid](#) to meet their workload and uphold their professional commitments.

This chronic work-induced stress can negatively impact every aspect of our lives including our physical health, mental health, and relationships. In an interview for Stress Awareness Week, Dr Neil Thompson emphasised that stress can act as a workplace health and safety issue and that under health and safety legislation there is an expectation that employers provide some degree of support for their employees. You can watch the full interview on the SWU website: <https://swu-union.org.uk/2023/04/talk-to-swu-interview-with-dr-neil-thompson-for-stress-awareness-month-2023>

Have you ever raised a H&S concern that was not acted on?

130 responses



We asked the social workers who have raised a Health and Safety concern that was not acted on what then happened, and heard about experiences that include:

- Concerns and suggested actions being ignored
- Risk assessments being nothing more than tick-box exercises
- Being retaliated against for speaking up
- Being told to be more resilient and to stop stressing
- Experiencing racism
- Having to work in conditions that made them ill
- Denied reasonable adjustment for a disability

There were some positive outcomes though, as several social workers said that the concern they raised resulted in a risk management process being used or put into place.

When asked what would improve their safety and wellbeing at work, there were some common responses:

- Lower caseloads
- No working unpaid overtime
- Better supervision that is reflective and regularly scheduled
- Less bureaucracy
- Less lone working
- More funding and resources
- More staff
- Better communication with space provided for exchanging ideas and open discussions with senior management
- Feeling valued
- More empathy from employees



BASW
The professional association for
social work and social workers

SWU
Social
Workers
Union

SWU and BASW will continue to push back on poor working conditions in the social work profession through our joint [“Stronger Social Work, Better Lives” campaign](#), the [Cross Party Group for Social Work](#) which was launched at Westminster in October 2025, and a new campaign in [solidarity with social work academics](#).

As part of the joint working conditions campaign with BASW, SWU is supporting the [BASW London Branch’s local campaign](#) to shine a light on working conditions and make a real difference. [If you are a social worker in London we encourage you to get involved!](#)

Parliamentary monitoring report - January 2026



Cross-Party Group on Social Work

- We are presently planning our next meeting with the group and will be announcing this soon.

Campaign Focus - Key Issues and Debates in Parliament

1. Anti-poverty - prioritising issues such as removing the two-child benefit cap

- The removal of the two-child limit was officially announced on **26th November 2025**, by Chancellor Rachel Reeves as a centrepiece of the [2025 Autumn Budget](#).
- The Government published their [child poverty strategy](#) on 5th December 2025. The strategy introduced a new headline poverty metric called 'deep material poverty,' which will be used alongside relative low income after housing costs to monitor the strategy's effectiveness.
- On 16th December, the House of Commons Library published [Deep material poverty: How many children are going without essentials?](#)
- [Government publishes roll-out plans for its Best Start Family Hubs](#) - The government has committed to establishing at least one Best Start Family Hub in **every local authority in England by April 2026**. Currently, there are approximately 900 hubs nationally, with plans to reach up to **1,000 hubs by 2028**. These "one-stop shops" integrate health, education, and social care, focusing heavily on the first **1,001 days** of life.

2. Workforce - working conditions, recruitment and retention, sharing research

- **Westminster Hall debate** called by Dr Simon Opher MP on the role of the NHS in preventing domestic homicides and domestic abuse-related deaths. Cat Eccles MP recommended mandatory specialist training for social workers in understanding the complexities of coercive control.

- **Assisted Dying Bill** - House of Lords - ongoing discussions about the role of the panel and decision-making - that includes social workers. BASW was quoted with regard to the poor standard of social care available.
- **Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Bill** - see below - mention of the use of non-social workers.

3. Social care reform - [Casey Commission \(Independent Commission on Adult Social Care\)](#), private sector funding, and Artificial Intelligence (AI)

- **Joint Committee on Human Rights - Human Rights of Children in the Social Care System in England** - to examine the extent to which the human rights of children in England are protected by the social care system. One evidence session discussed the role and work of the Children’s Commissioner on human rights issues affecting children in the social care system in England.
- **Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Bill** - House of Lords - discussed accommodation for looked after children including illegal care homes; mental health of young people in care; support for care leavers included published information about the local authority’s offer for them; importance of family conferences. Concerns raised about the use of “non social workers who will be now working in early help and child in need teams in relation to risk assessment and real concerns that they don’t have the same expertise both in risk assessment but also crucially in the identification of harm as qualified social workers.”

Parliamentary Business That may Affect Social Workers

| Name | Inquiry /stage | Key dates/Action |
|---|---|--|
| Public Accounts Committee | Financial sustainability of children’s care homes | Report published January 2026 |
| Assisted Dying Bill | House of Lords - see above notes | In progress |
| Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Bill Committee | House of Lords - see above notes | In progress |
| Mental Health Act | Received Royal Assent | Now in statute |
| Education Select Committee | Children’s Social Care | Report and Government response in October 2025 |
| Health and Social Care Committee | Community Mental Health Services | Report due 2 nd February 2026 |
| H&SC Committee | Adult Social Care Reform Report published | Government response on 5 th July |
| H&SC Select Committee | Inquiry - The first 1000 days of life | Report due 22 nd March 2026 |

Starting Strong: Why Early Professional Belonging Matters in Social Work Education

During the MA Social Work induction session held on 17th September 2025, I had the privilege of engaging with a new cohort of students at the very beginning of their professional journeys. Induction is often understood as an administrative threshold - defined by timetables, handbooks, and institutional orientation. Yet within social work education, it is something far more consequential. It is the point at which professional identity begins, often quietly, to take shape.

It is here that students first encounter not only the academic demands of the programme, but the ethical, emotional, and relational contours of the profession they are entering. How this moment is framed matters. What students are exposed to - values, support structures, and professional narratives - can influence how they understand themselves as future practitioners.

Part of my role during the session was to introduce students to the Social Workers Union (SWU) and the British Association of Social Workers (BASW), outlining their distinct yet complementary roles within the profession.

What emerged from this discussion was a clear sense of relief among students.

Many expressed reassurance in knowing that, even at the earliest stage of training, they are not expected to navigate placement pressures, ethical uncertainty, or professional vulnerability in isolation.

A central message shared was simple but vital: professional belonging should begin early, not after qualification. SWU, as the only UK trade union run for social workers by people qualified in social

work, offers students protection, advice, and representation - most notably in relation to placement difficulties, which remain one of the most challenging aspects of social work education. BASW, as the professional association, provides ethical guidance, professional development, and a collective voice that safeguards standards and advances the profession. Together, they form a critical support framework at a formative and often fragile stage of professional development.

Beyond organisational introductions, the session evolved into a peer-led conversation about the lived realities of social work education. Students raised practical concerns about managing workload, preparing for placement, developing reflective capacity, and sustaining social work values amidst academic and emotional demands.

It became clear that students are not merely seeking reassurance; they are seeking honest guidance, ethical grounding, and permission to ask difficult questions.

This is precisely where professional associations and trade unions matter most. Their value lies not only in crisis response, but in cultivating confidence, critical awareness, and collective identity. Students who understand their rights, responsibilities, and professional frameworks early are better positioned to practise ethically, reflect critically, and resist the normalisation of unsafe or unsupported practice.

The engagement and attentiveness of the cohort reaffirmed a fundamental truth: when students encounter SWU and BASW not as abstract institutions, but as living professional communities, they begin to see themselves not only as learners, but as future practitioners with voice, agency, and responsibility.

At a time when social work operates under increasing pressure, complexity, and public scrutiny, supporting students from the outset is not optional - it is foundational. Sustainable practice is not built on resilience alone, but on belonging, protection, and collective support.

I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to this early stage of students' professional formation, and for the continued work of SWU and BASW in strengthening, protecting, and shaping the future of social work - beginning with those who will carry it forward.



About the author

Wisdom P. Mensah is a BASW Student Ambassador and MA Social Work student at Liverpool John Moores University. He is a winner of the Social Workers Union (SWU) Assignment: World Social Work Day 2025 Essay Competition and a published contributor to SWU platforms. His writing focuses on the future of social work, with particular interest in ethics, professional judgement, and safeguarding human dignity in an era of technological and systemic change.

Discounted legal services for SWU members.



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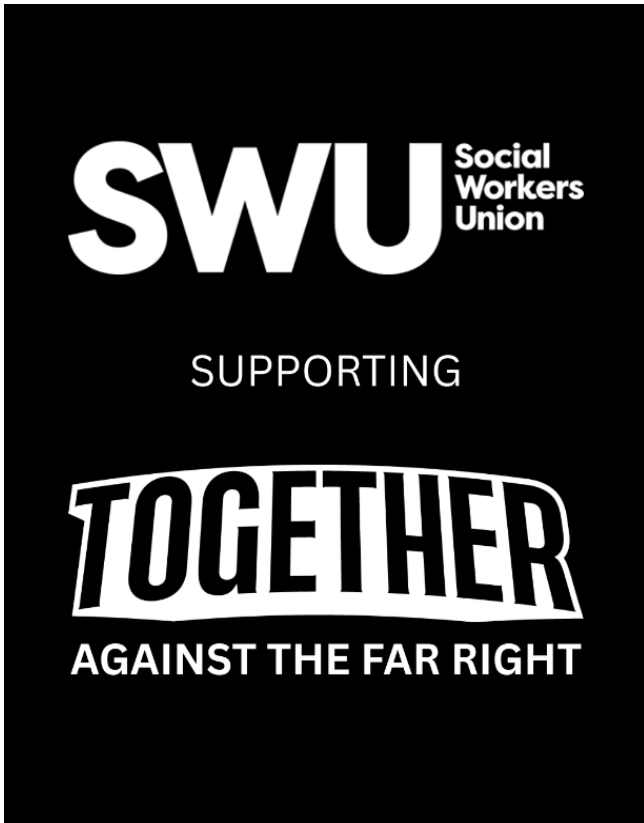
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Always there for you.



SWU is proud to stand with the TOGETHER Alliance

This new alliance has over 80 campaigns, organisations, and civil society groups alongside thousands of people, united against the division of the far right.

The voices of division in our country are growing louder and more confident. A [far right party](#) is topping the polls and they are mobilising the biggest numbers they ever have on the streets.

But we know we can change things when we stand together. This alliance is aiming to build unity over division, love over hate, and hope over fear.

That's why we're [why we're asking you to sign up, adding your name to the Together Alliance statement.](#)

We know that our strength lies in solidarity and unity. Your support helps make that unity visible and will inspire others to speak out.

Together, we can shift the culture. Join us at the National Demonstration.

It's in this spirit that we'll be mobilising and organising in the build-up to a **major national demonstration in London on Saturday, 28th March 2026.**

This is our first public action - and your participation will set the tone, showing that the majority of people in this country stand for unity, not division.

[Sign up here and join us at this powerful display of solidarity.](#)

Together, we can reject narratives of division and racism; build solidarity across communities; and unite against the far right.

We're so excited to have you with us.



Why Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Social Workers and Students Should Join the Social Workers Union

For Gypsy, Roma and Traveller social workers and students, joining the Social Workers Union (SWU) is not just about membership; it's about visibility, solidarity, and strength.

SWU is the only UK trade union exclusively for social workers and students of social work. It understands the pressures, ethics, and emotional demands of the profession. But most importantly, it stands for fairness, equity, and collective voice, values that align deeply with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller struggles for recognition and justice.

Protection, Representation and Voice

Gypsy, Roma and Traveller social workers and students can face distinct challenges, from racism and microaggressions in the workplace or on placement, to being stereotyped or silenced. SWU provides independent support, representation, and legal advice through its partnership with the British Association of Social Workers (BASW). This means that if you experience discrimination or are treated unfairly, you'll have someone in your corner who understands the profession and will fight for your rights.

A Platform to Challenge

Anti-Gypsyism is one of the most persistent and overlooked forms of racism in the UK. By joining SWU, Gypsy, Roma and Traveller members can help shape national policy conversations on equality, inclusion, and anti-racist practice. SWU provides a platform to ensure our voices influence campaigns,

professional standards, and education policy, ensuring anti-racism truly includes us all.

Standing in Solidarity

Union membership is a collective act of solidarity. For Gypsy, Roma and Traveller social workers, joining SWU means becoming part of a professional community committed to mutual support, empowerment, and justice. In a profession where Gypsy, Roma and Traveller representation remains extremely low, union membership offers connection, a reminder that you are not alone in the struggle for equality or in the pursuit of ethical, rights-based practice.

Shaping the Future of the Profession

SWU is campaigning nationally for better working conditions, fairer pay, and anti-oppressive workplaces. Gypsy, Roma and Traveller members bring lived experience that strengthens those campaigns. By joining, you're not only protecting yourself you're helping redefine the culture of social work to be truly inclusive and accountable. Your perspective can help transform the profession into one that fully reflects the communities it serves.

Building Connection

For students, membership offers a chance to connect with other students and professionals who share a commitment to equality and social justice. Joining us builds professional confidence and collective awareness from the start of your career.

About the author

Allison Hulmes is a Co-founding member of the Romani & Traveller Social Work Association, Senior Social Work Lecturer and Researcher at Swansea University, and SWU Executive Committee Representative for Wales.



SASW and SWU have published a new guide for UK social workers to keep their personal information safe online.



Reducing the risk of doxxing: A mini guide for social workers



The deliberate publication of personal information online without consent, often with the intention to intimidate, harass, or undermine confidence in professional practice



This guidance outlines practical measures to reduce risk and ensure personal and professional safety online



You have the right to safety, privacy, and protection at work

The Scottish Association of Social Work (SASW) and the Social Workers Union (SWU) are jointly committed to supporting the safety, wellbeing, and professional integrity of social workers. In recent years, social workers have increasingly been targeted through doxxing, which is the deliberate publication of personal information online without consent, often with the intention to intimidate, harass, or undermine confidence in professional practice.

Given the sensitive nature of social work, practitioners must take proactive steps to protect their digital footprint. This guidance outlines practical measures to reduce risk and ensure personal and professional safety online.

This free guide can be used by social workers across the UK. You are welcome to download this guide and share it with your team and colleagues.

Download your free copy of the SASW & SWU “Reducing the risk of Doxxing: A mini guide for social workers” here: <https://swu-union.org.uk/reducing-the-risk-of-doxxing-a-mini-guide-for-social-workers-scotland-2>

BASW Northern Ireland and SWU have also produced a guide for social workers in Northern Ireland which can be downloaded here: <https://swu-union.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Reducing-the-risk-of-Doxxing-A-mini-guide-for-social-workers-NI-1.pdf>

Versions of this guide specifically for social workers in England and Wales will be available soon!

Social work in the media

In 2022, SWU and BASW [launched guidance with UK press regulator IMPRESS](#) for journalists reporting on the work of social workers with the aim to provide more protection for those working in the social work profession. This initiative was sparked by the harrowing stories SWU members shared with their union about the impacts that poor media reporting about the profession had on them - impacts that not only affected their personal and professional lives, but their families as well.

In 2023, SWU hosted a webinar with the Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO), which regulates most UK newspapers and magazines, as well as digital news content. In this event summary IPSO outlines how it operates and how social workers can seek its support and protection: <https://swu-union.org.uk/2023/06/swu-event-outlines-how-social-workers-can-seek-help-from-press-regulator>

In 2024, SWU met with broadcast regulator Ofcom to discuss media portrayal of the profession. Learn more about Ofcom's broadcast standards and complaints process here: <https://swu-union.org.uk/2024/05/swu-meets-with-ofcom-social-work-media-portrayal>

A New Voice for London Social Workers: Why Now Matters

High caseloads, chronic vacancies, escalating complexity, moral distress, and the erosion of time for reflective, relationship-based practice are no longer isolated issues, they are everyday realities for too many of us.

That is why we are pleased to share the re-launch of the BASW London Branch, and to invite London-based social workers to get involved at a moment when our collective voice is more important than ever.

The creation of the branch reflects a growing recognition that social workers in London face distinct pressures that require coordinated, visible and collective responses. From the cost-of-living crisis and

workforce instability to widening inequality and increasing demand, the context we are practising in demands action - not just resilience.

A key priority for the branch is shining a light on working conditions in London. To do that credibly, we need evidence. We strongly encourage all London social workers to complete the [BASW London Working Conditions Survey](#). Whether you work in children's services, adults' services, mental health, safeguarding, the voluntary sector or independent practice - your experience matters.

**This survey is not a tick-box exercise.
It is a tool for influence.**

The findings will help to:

- Build a clear picture of workload pressures, wellbeing and workforce sustainability
- Strengthen collective bargaining and advocacy
- Inform future campaigning, policy engagement and local action
- Support collaboration between trade unions and professional bodies

The stronger the response rate, the harder it becomes for decision-makers to ignore what social workers are telling them.

We are also keen to work collaboratively with the SWU Campaign Fund, particularly where evidence from London can support targeted campaigning around safe caseloads, retention and ethical working conditions. There is real potential for BASW London Branch members and SWU members to align our efforts and maximise impact.

To take this work forward, [the BASW London Branch is hosting an event on 24th March](#), and all London social workers are warmly invited to attend.

The event will include:

- Initial findings from the BASW London Working Conditions Survey, exploring what the data is telling us and what needs to happen next
- Guest speakers [Adi Cooper](#) and [Nana Yabbey-Hagan](#) with experience across

adult and children's services, reflecting on the current challenges facing social work with children in London

- Space for discussion, connection and collective problem-solving

This event is about more than sharing information. It is about building momentum, solidarity and practical routes to change.

If you are a London-based SWU member, we would especially encourage you to join the BASW London Branch Committee.

We meet every month. Branch involvement offers a meaningful way to shape priorities, influence campaigns and ensure that the realities of frontline practice are reflected in advocacy and action.

Social workers are often told to adapt, cope and carry on. But lasting change has never come from silence or isolation. It comes when we organise, gather evidence and speak together.

Complete the [survey](#). [Come to the event](#). Join the branch.

London social workers deserve working conditions that make good practice possible - and together, we can push for them.

To find out more about the London Branch please e-mail us at: london.branch@basw.co.uk

About the authors



Janet Ayoola is a social worker, SWU member, Co-Chair of the BASW London Branch, and host of The Social Work Pivot Podcast.

Nadine Boyne is a social worker and Co-Chair of the BASW London Branch. She is the author of Social Work is Not Self-Harm: Make the SAVI Shift to Unlock Your Power, Purpose and Joy.



SWU contributes to 'Social Work Reflections', 1st edition

SWU General Secretary John McGowan and SWU Ambassador Professor Jermaine Ravalier contributed to a chapter in the Open University Press 'Social Work Reflections' new book aimed at Newly Qualified Social Workers, Practitioners and Social Work managers.



Why the topic of reflective supervision?

Support from colleagues, peers, and managers can act as a buffer to poor wellbeing by providing the resources that individuals need to cope at work. One support mechanism we consistently heard about from all the social workers that we spoke to is the use of reflective supervision. Across all of our studies with social workers, reflective supervision was described as one of the key approaches that can be used to support both social worker wellbeing and their practice. However, for many that we spoke to, supervision was often described as a tick box exercise designed to keep an eye on case progression rather than to support and help develop social workers.

John McGowan, General Secretary of SWU, said:

"Supervision is a key area in social work development. I am therefore delighted that with Prof. Jermaine Ravalier we were able to contribute to this new publication. Common feedback from members indicates that most of the supervision is ad hoc and irregular. More significantly, feedback has highlighted that it often does not include a discussion linked to reflection, learning and development - it is often reduced to a process of case management. It is important to note that previous working conditions research has demonstrated that effective supervision is associated with higher job satisfaction, commitment to the organisation and retention."

Professor Jermaine Ravalier, who is , Pro-Vice Chancellor (Academic) at Buckinghamshire New University said:

"Reflective supervision is crucial to social work practice, but little is known about how reflective supervision works and what the outcomes of reflective supervision are for social workers and their service users. This project co-produced the best approach to reflective supervision. The project began with a rapid review of the literature around reflective supervision, with a particular focus on what works, why, and the implications of both good and poor reflective supervision."

The chapter builds on previous work from John and Jermaine on Reflective Supervision with more to come this year:

<https://swu-union.org.uk/resources-training/swu-bnu-reflective-supervision-best-practice-guide-2024/>

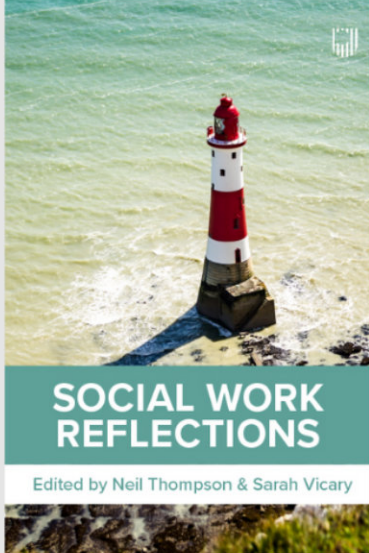


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Social Work Reflections, 1st Edition

ISBN 9780335253234 | PUB DATE: NOVEMBER 2025 | RRP: £32.99 EBOOK: £26.99

“This book stands out for its integration of knowledge from lived experience, inclusive practice, and compassionate pedagogy - making it essential reading for students and practitioners alike.”

Lucy Basterra, Senior Lecturer in Social Work, University of Brighton, UK

“I wholeheartedly recommend this book to anyone committed to reflective, ethical, and compassionate social work practice.”

Gwenan Prysor, Senior Lecturer in Social Work, Bangor University, UK

DESCRIPTION

Social Work Reflections is a compelling testament to the significance and impact of social work. Recognizing the challenges practitioners face in an increasingly complex and evolving field, this edited collection brings together diverse perspectives from educators, practitioners and managers to showcase the vital role social workers play in advancing social justice and safeguarding society’s most vulnerable members.

Drawing on the expertise of academics, practitioners and individuals with the lived experience of social work services, this book aims to inspire progress and empower students, practitioners and managers at all levels of study and practice by emphasizing their value as drivers of individual and collective change.

The book:

- **Emphasizes the core values of social work: social justice, dignity and compassion**
- **Integrates theoretical insights with lived experiences from diverse contributors, enriching nuanced areas of practice**
- **Encourages development of critical thinking and reflection skills**
- **Offers encouragement to practitioners, managers and students striving to achieve positive outcomes under challenging circumstances**

Social Work Reflections is the essential companion for students, newly qualified social workers, practitioners and managers. Of value to anyone considering a career in social work, this book reaffirms the crucial role social work plays in building a more just and compassionate society.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Neil Thompson is an award-winning writer and educator and a visiting professor at the Open University and Wrexham University, UK.

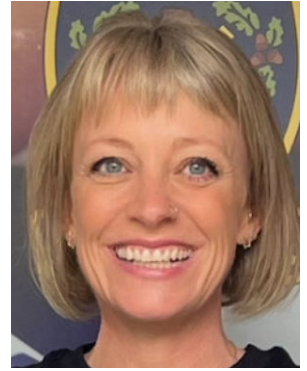
Sarah Vicary is Professor of Social Work and Mental Health at The Open University, UK.

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Are you interested in using *Social Work Reflections*, 1st Edition?
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Fun Is a Serious Business: Why Social Workers Need More Joy at Work



SWU Vice Chair Chrissie Beatty reflects on the role that joy plays in our wellbeing and how to cultivate it in the workplace.

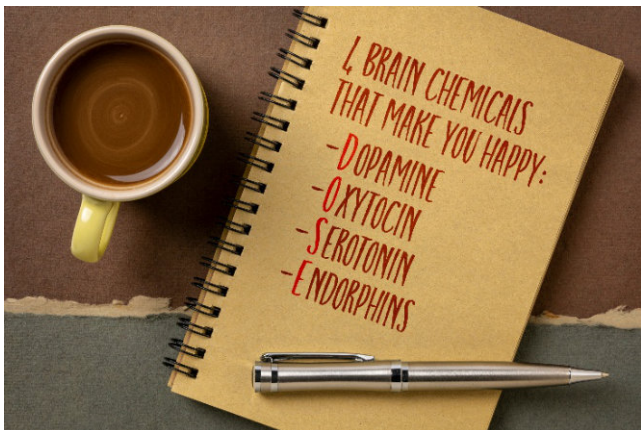
On a Monday morning, “fun” might not be the first thing you think about as you reach for your ID badge and your third cup of coffee. But fun isn’t a luxury - it’s a key ingredient in happiness, wellbeing, and resilience, especially in social work.

Let’s be honest: this job is tough. More than [90% of social workers report moderate-to-high emotional exhaustion](#), and up to half are considering leaving due to relentless pressures. To weather the daily storms, we need emotional armour - and fun is one of the strongest pieces of kit we have.

Why Fun Matters (Here’s the Science Bit)

When we have fun, our brains switch into a positive state. We release “feel-good” chemicals like serotonin and dopamine, which:

- boost pleasure
- reduce stress and pain
- strengthen the immune system
- enhance memory and creativity
- and even make time feel like it’s speeding up



A proper belly laugh relaxes muscles and lowers stress for up to 45 minutes. Laugh for 10-15 minutes a day and you can burn around 40 calories - which means you’ve practically earned an extra KitKat finger on your tea break.

During lockdown, my mum and I joined an online [laughter yoga](#) group. It gave us such a lift during some very heavy days. If you’ve never heard of laughter yoga, it might be just the thing to kick off your next team meeting!

Fun Makes Work Better - Literally

[Research](#) consistently shows that fun at work improves creativity and innovation by reducing stress and opening up the mind. The University of Warwick found that happy employees are, on average, 12% more productive than those who aren’t feeling the joy.

Inspired by the famously cheerful Pike Place fishmongers in Seattle, John Christensen created the [FISH! Philosophy](#), which includes Play as one of its core principles - bringing light-heartedness, creativity, and fun into everyday tasks.

Even Greg James, in his book [All the Best for the Future](#), talks about rediscovering playfulness in adult life. When was the last time you genuinely had fun? Life and work can easily become serious, but ironically that's exactly when we need fun the most.

“But We’re Under Pressure - How Can We Make Space for Fun?”

Great question. Fun doesn't mean ignoring the harsh realities: high workloads, vicarious trauma, funding issues, or the computer crashing right before you save a support plan (we've all been there). Acknowledging these struggles is essential because to do so would invalidate the very real feelings and emotions that these bring and we need to continue to challenge the systems and structures that cause them.

And I'm not suggesting whoopee cushions on your manager's chair or frogs in the stationery cupboard (but if you do try either... please tell me).

Here are some actually helpful ideas:

1. Turn admin into a game

As Mary Poppins said: "In every job that must be done, there is an element of fun, you find the fun and - snap! - the job's a game!". Race a colleague to finish case notes; the loser makes the tea for a week. A little competition never hurt anyone.

2. Start meetings with joy

Have a "good news minute" where everyone shares something positive. It might be a beautiful sunset... or winning a lifetime supply of chocolate delivered daily by David Beckham. Anything goes.

3. Make learning more enjoyable

Try "lunch and learn" sessions: bring-and-share food + a guest speaker = full stomachs and full minds.

4. Build a gratitude wall

In the office or online, create a space for quick thank-you notes. Small acknowledgements go a long way in lifting spirits and strengthening team morale.

5. Create opportunities for connection

With remote and hot-desk working, social contact is limited. Commit to one fun activity a month as a team - walks, quizzes, ice cream trips, crafts... whatever brings people together.

6. Keep an emergency joke book

Perfect for tough days or heavy atmospheres. Even terrible jokes count - they might cause groans, but that's still a mood shift. Why couldn't the Social Workers bike stand up by itself...? Because it was two tired!

7. Choose your mood - be the sunshine

[Moods are contagious](#). Just as negativity spreads, positivity can ripple through a team. We can't control everything, but we can influence our mindset.

Fun Isn't Optional - It's Essential

Fun doesn't just drop into our laps; we have to create it. It's a habit - and the more we practice it, the more we rewire our brains to notice joy, seek out the good, and welcome lightness into our day.

So go ahead: find something today, however small, that brings a smile. Your wellbeing - and your work - will be better for it.





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SWU Social
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Campaign Fund

Powering change together: get involved with the SWU Campaign Fund

The coming year offers a real opportunity for social workers to shape the future of our profession.

Run by the Social Workers Union in partnership with social enterprise Campaign Collective, the Campaign Fund exists to help members and branches turn good ideas into real-world impact. It can support campaigning activity that aligns with SWU's values and priorities, whether that's local organising, public-facing campaigns, political engagement or creative projects that amplify social workers' voices.

If you have an idea that could influence policy, raise awareness or improve working conditions, the Fund is there to help you get it off the ground.

Social workers know better than anyone how workload pressures, underfunding and staff shortages affect both practitioners and vulnerable people.

The Campaign Fund can help ensure those lived experiences shape the debate early.

You don't need to have a fully formed national campaign. Local, regional and issue-specific ideas are encouraged, especially where they can feed into wider political moments or build momentum ahead of elections.

For social workers in Scotland and Wales, the elections are on the horizon and new governments will be forming, new programmes agreed and new priorities set. That creates space for fresh ideas, bold campaigning and practical action to improve conditions for social workers and the people we support.

SWU has also been strengthening its voice at Westminster.

In October 2025, SWU launched the [Cross Party Group \(CPG\) for Social Work](#) with MPs and Peers attending an afternoon tea in the House of Commons, hosted by the Chair, Ian Byrne MP. Since then, the group has grown to 20 MPs and Peers, all committed to focusing on the realities facing the profession.

The CPG will shine a spotlight on unsustainable workload pressures, chronic underfunding of services as well as workforce wellbeing and retention.

A key focus will be making clear how the shortage of social workers puts vulnerable people at risk, while also taking a toll on those still in post. The group will also support SWU's campaign to recruit more student social workers and to secure better financial support for students entering the profession.

This parliamentary work strengthens the case for campaigning activity on the ground and creates new opportunities for members to influence national debate. Members can play a direct role in growing and strengthening this voice:

- [Email your MP](#) and ask them to join the Cross Party Group on Social Work. Explain why tackling workload pressures is essential to recruiting and retaining social workers, and share your own experience from practice.
- [Contact a Peer](#) if there is one who lives in or has a connection to your city, town, or village. A personal message can make a real difference.
- [Apply to the SWU Campaign Fund](#) if you have an idea for a campaign or project that could build pressure for change, especially in the run-up to the Scottish and Welsh elections.

If you've ever thought "someone should do something about this", the Campaign Fund is a way to make that "someone" you. Now is the time to get involved, be ambitious and help shape a better future for social work.

To get involved, email campaigns@swu-union.org.uk.

Right To Food UK Commission - Call for Evidence



The Right to Food UK Commission is collecting evidence and lived experiences regarding feeding families and communities in the UK.

The Social Workers Union (SWU) and British Association of Social

Evidence can be reports and work completed in the last few years or completed for the Commission.

Your inputs will contribute to the Commission Report and Right to Food legislation roadmap, which will use evidence submitted to develop an Action Plan for the UK to make the Right to Food a reality by 2030.

Workers (BASW) back the Right To Food UK Commission. This is an opportunity for social workers to contribute their experiences and ideas, to help reduce the numbers of people who go to bed hungry in the UK.

Read the call for evidence here: <https://www.ianbyrne.org/rtfcommission-call-for-evidence>

The Commission wants to hear from as many individuals, community leaders, community groups, non-government organisations, academics and food service providers, health and social workers and activists for the Right to Food campaign.

There will be 6 Commission Evidence Sessions held around the UK between January and May 2026, supported by community conversations in each region.

Please raise your voice and share your experiences. What is working to improve access to food and what is not?

You can also submit evidence online to the Right to Food UK Commission: <https://www.ianbyrne.org/right-to-food-commission-uk-submit-evidence-1>

The sooner you submit evidence, the better!

Solidarity with Social Work Academics

The Social Workers Union has begun work on a new campaign on solidarity with social work academics and university-based programmes.

This work comes after a motion passed by a strong majority in support of the campaign at the 25th September 2025 SWU Annual General Meeting.

A well-attended initial campaign planning meeting brought together lecturers and programme leaders from across the UK to share first-hand experiences of cuts, restructures, and growing pressures in higher education that are putting social work education at risk.

Participants highlighted how financial pressures on universities are eroding staffing, support roles, and wellbeing with knock-on impacts for student support, placement readiness, and course quality. There was strong agreement that this is not only an academic workplace issue but a threat to the future social work workforce, the profession's evidence base, and the diversity of those entering practice.

SWU members also raised the urgency of reviewing student funding and bursaries, with many reporting that students are forced to work alongside study, creating risks in placement periods and driving attrition.

John McGowan, SWU General Secretary, stated, "Social work education is the foundation of our profession. When university programmes are undermined by cuts, insecure funding and excessive pressures, it threatens not only academics, but the future workforce, the quality of practice and the diversity of those entering social work. This campaign is about solidarity - and about safeguarding the future of social work itself."

Allison Hulmes, Senior Lecturer and Researcher at Swansea University, commented, "The future of social work depends on how we value the educators who form it. Until the academic role is properly understood - its regulatory responsibility, research generation and dissemination, pastoral load, and partnership labour - social work education will remain undervalued, and the profession will feel the consequences."

SWU will now work with academics, other unions and partners to develop a clear campaign plan, including parliamentary and media tactics, and will convene a follow-up session shortly to agree next steps. UK social work academics are invited to attend this follow-up session which will take place **online on Thursday, February 19th from 3:30 - 4:15pm** by booking their free place here: <https://basw.co.uk/events/solidarity-social-work-academics-and-university-based-programmes-second-meeting>

If academics would like to be involved in the campaign, then please contact SWU General Secretary John McGowan at: campaigns@swu-union.org.uk

Agency Social Workers Raise Alarms to SWU Over Sudden Contract Losses, Negative Narratives, and Declining Professional Respect

The Social Workers Union has received a growing number of reports from agency social workers describing abrupt contract terminations, unilateral rate cuts, and a growing culture of stigma towards agency staff across multiple services. All contributors provided their statements anonymously due to fear of repercussions, but their experiences reflect a widespread pattern emerging since early 2024.

SWU General Secretary **John McGowan** has been briefed directly on the situation from some Independent Social Workers and expressed deep concern at the treatment described by members.

“These testimonies reflect a deeply concerning pattern. Agency social workers have always been a vital part of service delivery, stepping in during periods of short staffing, transition, and crisis. To hear that so many are now being dismissed, stigmatised, or treated without consultation is unacceptable. SWU is committed to ensuring their voices are heard and their contribution recognised at every level of the sector.”

Long-standing Agency Workers Given Sudden Notice

Many agency social workers report being released from roles they have held for several years with minimal warning. One agency worker who served five years in the same service said:

“I was given three weeks’ notice. Since April, every agency worker I know has been pushed to seek other roles. By next week, the service will have zero agency workers left.” Such rapid turnover has left individuals without financial stability and has stripped services of experienced practitioners overnight.

Growing Stigma and Mischaracterisation

Agency SWU members say the tone toward agency workers has grown increasingly hostile, with their motives and professionalism being questioned without justification. **“It has felt like our experience no longer matters. We’re suddenly being viewed negatively, as if we’re only in it for the money,”** said one worker. **“I chose agency work to improve work-life balance and avoid burnout - not to earn more.”**

Unconsulted Cuts to Pay and Conditions

Several workers also reported unilateral reductions to their hourly rates. **“My rate was reduced without any consultation. It wasn’t a negotiation - it was an instruction,”** one worker said. Employees described the decision as disrespectful and destabilising.

Inspection Pressures Leading to Contract Losses

In some cases, contract terminations followed CQC inspections where “over-reliance on agency workers” was framed as a service weakness. Workers expressed frustration that their presence was described negatively, despite contributing essential stability during recruitment challenges.

Loss of Service Expertise

Many services previously relied exclusively on experienced agency social

workers. Those individuals are now being replaced with newly qualified staff, resulting in a significant loss of experience. **“We’ve lost a lot of skilled workers. Experience is being replaced by inexperience - and that has consequences for service quality,”** one SWU member reported.

A Professional Workforce Feeling Undervalued

Agency workers emphasised their dedication to their roles: supporting new staff, mentoring students, formally requesting leave despite no entitlement to paid holidays, and working with the same commitment as permanent colleagues. Yet, despite this, many report feeling devalued for the first time. **“For years I felt appreciated. But recently, attitudes shifted. The narrative changed - and suddenly, we were the problem,”** said another SWU member.

Palestine Solidarity Campaign - Trade Unionism, Internationalism and Palestine in 2026

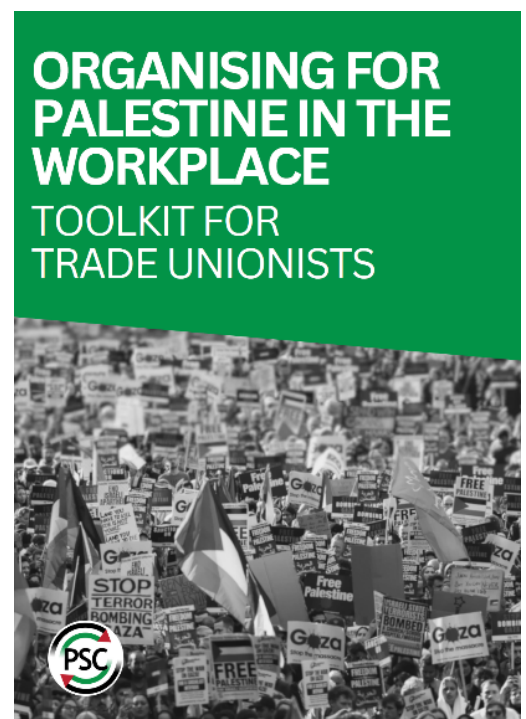
In Palestine, workers continue to face the crimes of genocide, apartheid, and occupation. Medical staff, journalists, and aid workers and their families have been deliberately targeted, and Israel continues to deny access to humanitarian aid to millions of Palestinians, imposing an illegal siege against the people of Gaza.

The Palestine Solidarity Campaign (PSC) held an online rally on 28th January to hear from British and Palestinian trade unionists and activists about how to organise in 2026, across unions and workplaces, and how to put pressure on companies, organisations, and governments to end complicity with Israel’s crimes.

This webinar was open to trade union members, workplace organisers, reps, and activists. It introduced the new [Organising for Palestine in the Workplace - Toolkit for Trade Unionists](#) which is a practical organising guide. It’s about building collective power and provides practical tools, templates, and strategies for workplace mapping, campaign planning, and communicating about Palestine.

Jess Barnard, PSC Trade Union Organiser and activist, stated at the rally, “Trade Unions exist to fight exploitation, oppression, and injustice but those issues don’t end once we leave the shop floor. As solidarity activists we need to organise to answer the call from Palestinian civil society for boycotts, divestment, and sanctions.”

If you were not able to attend you can watch the recording on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/palestinesolidarityuk/videos/1347923117332721>



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128 Theobald's Road
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30th January 2026

The Rt Hon Keir Starmer MP,
Prime Minister,
10 Downing Street,
London, SW1A 2AA.

Dear Prime Minister,

We are gravely concerned about the recent developments in Syria and the attacks on the Kurdish led SDF by forces of the Syrian Transitional Government acting alongside jihadi militias. Of particular concern are credible reports that ISIS prisoners have been released during these assaults, raising the clear and present danger of an ISIS resurgence.

The UK and wider international community owe a huge debt to the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) who played a decisive role in the defeat of ISIS. At immense human cost, they stood on the front line against one of the most brutal forces of our time, defending not only their own communities but humanity as a whole. Thousands gave their lives in that struggle, a sacrifice that must never be forgotten or betrayed.

These developments point to an explicit intention to dismantle the democratic institutions established by the Autonomous Administration of North East Syria (Rojava) and exact violent revenge — especially against women fighters of the YPJ whose leadership and liberation struggle ISIS and other reactionary forces have long sought to destroy. The targeting of women who symbolise emancipation and equality underscores the misogynistic nature of these attacks.

The military aggression, violence and violations of international law by Jolani's HTS forces and jihadi militias, and the abandonment of Rojava by the international community, risks undoing hard-won gains and plunging the area back into chaos with devastating consequences for civilians across Syria and beyond.

As trade unionists committed to peace, democracy, women's rights, and international solidarity, we call on you to:

FREEDOM
FOR
OCALAN
#FREEOCALAN



THE PROFESSIONAL VOICE
OF PROUK FIREFIGHTERS

- Publicly condemn the recent attacks on the SDF and allied forces
- Oppose any UK cooperation with forces aligned with jihadi militias
- Act to prevent the release and regrouping of ISIS fighters
- Support the protection of Rojava and its autonomous democratic institutions
- Press for the inclusion of Rojava's representatives in any political settlement on Syria
- Ensure humanitarian aid and reconstruction support reaches the region without obstruction

The labour movement has always stood with those struggling for democracy, equality, and freedom from oppression. We urge you to honour that tradition and ensure the UK plays a principled and active role in defending the people of Rojava and the values they represent.

We look forward to your response and to meaningful action in solidarity with the Kurdish people.

Yours faithfully,

Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen (ASLEF)

Bakers, Food and Allied Workers Union (BFAWU)

Commercial Workers Union (CWU)

Fire Brigades Union (FBU)

GMB union

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Remember - investigations into professional social work practice and allegations of misconduct - where this is done by your employer, representation is only guaranteed* if you are a member of SWU.

SWU sits on the National Executive of the General Federation of Trade Unions. Have a look at the access you get as a member of GFTU training and development. SWU is one of the fastest growing unions in the UK - be part of the progress.

Being part of a strong growing trade union is a vital and recognised way of successfully being part of the Trade Union movement. Help us campaign for better working conditions, pay and professional recognition. If you want to join SWU or learn more about becoming actively involved as a Union Contact get in touch: unioncontacts@swu-union.org.uk or email SWU Admin: joanne.marciano@swu-union.org.uk



Belong to a Social Work union that:

- is lobbying MPs and Peers to improve working conditions for social workers.
- partners with organisations to support good working conditions and with opportunities to be active as a SWU Union Contact.
- campaigns to change legislation bills.
- collaborates with external unions and continue to be active through membership of General Federation of Trade Unions and ongoing union campaigns.
- funds the Austerity Action Group and opportunities to get involved.

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- Full guaranteed employment representation*
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- Opportunity to be active as part of the trade union movement
- Monthly Newsletter

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